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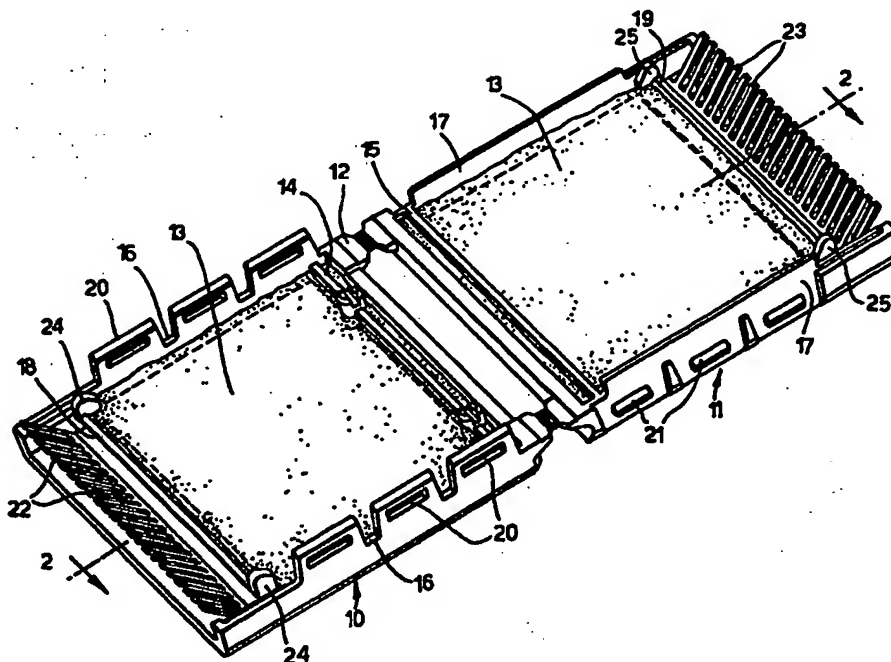
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(54) Title: SEALING ENCLOSURE DEVICE



(57) Abstract

Two-shell flat casing (10, 11) has inner receptacle for low-viscosity gel precursor (13) which sets (preferably by curing) in receptacle and has displaceable wall (18) which is displaced by camming action (24, 25) on closing together of the shells to allow the wires or other enclosed objects to extend out of the casing through space previously occupied by the displaced wall. Polysiloxane gels and glass-filled polypropylene casings are preferred, preferably moulded as a single hinged piece with a hinge and frangible retaining webs for the displaceable wall. The design is well suited to high-volume automated production, e.g. for the automotive wiring market.

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SEALING ENCLOSURE DEVICE

This invention relates to devices for enclosing portions of elongate objects, for example electrical wire connectors, and sealant material, preferably gel, to protect the said objects against contamination.

Gel-containing enclosures for many purposes are known, for example from EP-A-0108518 (MP0838) and many subsequent patents. The present invention is concerned with new forms of enclosure devices which have outstanding advantages, especially in certain arrangements hereinafter described.

The invention accordingly provides a device for enclosing portions of elongate objects and sealant material, comprising at least two (preferably only two) casing members closeable together to enclose the said portions of the objects in use, at least one of the casing members having a floor portion and upstanding walls forming a receptacle (preferably substantially leakproof) capable of receiving settable fluid sealant material and retaining it (preferably all of it, although some leakage may be acceptable in some circumstances) until set, wherein at least one of the said upstanding walls is arranged for displacement by contact with one or more displacing parts of the other said casing member upon closure.

This invention has the advantage that a relatively thin flat layer of sealant can be conveniently formed in the casing members, even when the sealant material has a low initial viscosity and a long setting time (for example the polysiloxane gels described in the aforementioned EP-A-0108518), and can then be used to seal around elongate objects extending from the device substantially parallel to the surface of the sealant, thus making it possible to maintain a low (preferably substantially flat) profile for the objects and the device. Without such displacement, the walls needed to retain the sealant until it has set would interfere with the extending objects on closure of the sealing device about them. The displaceable walls also have advantages of greater robustness in manufacture and use of the sealing enclosure device than would be achievable by frangible walls thin enough

to be broken by lateral pressure of the objects on the top of the walls on closure of the device. This displacement of the displaceable wall could in some circumstances allow the sealant to flow around the enclosed objects or into other desired positions, but it is usually preferable that the sealant be substantially non-flowable, especially preferably in a gel state, prior to the closing of the device which displaces the wall.

References herein to the settable fluid sealant material include materials which are initially in a fluid molten state and subsequently set in the said receptacle by cooling, for example greases, mastics, or thermoplastic gels, especially oil-extended styrene-hydrogenated alkylene-styrene triblock copolymer gels with added polyphenylene ether for improved temperature performance as described in WO-A-8800603 (RK308). Materials which set by chemical reaction, preferably polysiloxane gel-forming materials, may, however, be preferred, especially for some high-temperature uses such as protecting wiring connections in the hotter parts of automotive wiring harnesses and assemblies.

It is usually preferred that the casing members are arranged so that when they are closed together in use to enclose the said portions of the objects, the said portions of the objects are at least partly within the said receptacle and extend therefrom through space previously occupied by the displaced wall. It can readily be envisaged that elongate objects such as wires are pressed laterally into the layer of sealant, preferably gel, upon closure of the casing members around the objects. The displaceable wall is thus highly advantageous, since it permits setting, preferably automated filling and setting, of even very-low-initial-viscosity sealant material, such as the aforementioned polysiloxane gels, while still enabling the objects to be pressed into the set gel in the flattest possible configuration for advantageous space saving, for example in applications where space is at a premium, such as automotive or other high performance vehicle wiring.

In most cases, the said receptacle has at least two upstanding walls, preferably four upstanding walls, the receptacle preferably being substantially rectangular, and the displaceable wall constitutes substantially the whole of one of the upstanding walls. The

receptacle could, for example, be formed by a single curved wall, the ends of which connect with the ends of a single displaceable (preferably substantially straight) wall, although four upstanding walls in substantially rectangular arrangement will be preferable for many purposes. Substantially straight walls may be preferable in all cases. The ends of the respective walls will be defined by discernible meeting points, although not necessarily sharp or square corners, and the cross-sectional shape of the walls need not be constant or regular along their length.

In some preferred arrangements, the said displacing part(s) is(are) arranged to contact at least one (preferably both) end region(s) of the displaceable wall to bring about the said displacement in use. In such cases, it is preferred that the said end region(s) of the displaceable wall is(are) enlarged to form a cam or lever on which the said displacing part bears to effect the said displacement in use.

It is usually convenient that the displaceable wall is hinged to the casing member carrying it and the arrangement is such that the said displacement in use involves hinging movement of the displaceable wall towards the floor portion. The hinge is preferably "a living hinge" formed by moulding of the casing member, and in embodiments of the invention designed to be closed seldom or only once, acceptable hinge performance can unexpectedly be achieved even with surprisingly high glass or other strengthening filler contents (e.g. 40% by weight) in the casing material. Preferably, the arrangement is such that substantially the whole length of the displaceable wall is displaced upon closure of the casing members together in use. Other arrangements of the displaceable wall in the device and other mechanisms for displacement are not, however, excluded.

In especially preferred embodiments of the present invention, frangible webs connect each end of the displaceable wall to an adjacent wall, the webs being frangible by forces they encounter during the said displacement of the displaceable wall in use. It will be appreciated that such frangible webs can be made very short, bridging only a small space between the end of the displaceable wall and an adjacent wall, such a structure being advantageously more robust for moulding and subsequent use than a long

frangible wall which might be subject to breakage or distortion during manufacture. A robust displaceable wall with relatively short frangible webs will be advantageous for high speed production, eg by injection moulding, for markets where high volume production is required, for example the automotive wiring market. Preferably the webs are notched to propagate tearing.

Devices according to this invention include those with the said receptacle having only one displaceable wall so that the said elongate objects in use extend from the device substantially in a single direction; and those with the said receptacle having at least two displaceable walls so that the said elongate objects in use can extend from the device in at least two directions inclined to each other preferably at an angle of at least 60° , more preferably at least 90° , especially preferably substantially 180° .

In many cases, it will be preferable that the said other casing member forms a second receptacle with at least one displaceable wall and any of the features hereinbefore specified for such receptacles and displaceable walls may apply *mutatis mutandis* in any combination to the second receptacle and its displaceable wall(s). Thus, although a single receptacle-forming casing member with a "lid-forming" second casing member may be useful for some purposes, it will usually be preferable for the two casing members to resemble each other fairly closely, perhaps as mirror-images in some respects, while allowing for variations to enable them to be conveniently fitted and secured together. Preferably, the casing members are moulded as integral units of plastics material, preferably polypropylene. Suitable known moulding methods and equipment can readily be selected by those skilled in such technology. Polypropylene containing 40% by weight glass fibre filler is a preferred casing material, although other mouldable polymers may be selected to suit conditions of manufacture and/or end use. Preferably, the casing members are hinged together ready for the said closure in use, preferably by formation of a hinge during a moulding process which forms both casing members together. The casing members may be secured together in any convenient way after closure, preferably being snap-fittable together to secure the said closure.

As aforementioned, the device is preferably shaped to fit closely around portions of a substantially flat array of elongate objects, preferably electrical wires, the diameter of the largest enclosed object preferably being not more than 4 times, more preferably not more than twice, the diameter of the smallest enclosed object. The devices of the present invention, especially when the cohesive and conformable preferred gel sealants are used, can advantageously accommodate variations in the sizes and numbers of objects such as wires to be enclosed.

The invention naturally includes the device with the said sealant material present in the said receptacle(s), the sealant material preferably being a gel, more preferably a cross-linked polysiloxane gel, as hereinbefore mentioned, the disclosure of EP-A-0108518 in this respect being incorporated herein by reference. Suitable polysiloxane gels, or other chemically cross-linkable gels such as polyurethanes, or thermoplastic gels, preferably oil-extended tri-block copolymer gels, as known per se, may be selected according to convenience and end use requirements. The polysiloxane gels, which tend to provide superior temperature performance, have particularly low initial viscosity and a relatively long cure time for the cross-linking reaction to polymerise them into a set state, and are thus likely to benefit especially from the retentive receptacle and displaceable wall of the present invention. The devices according to the invention are especially well suited to automated filling of the sealant material into injection-moulded casings, all being conducive to high production speeds desirable for high volume automotive and other markets as aforesaid. The invention naturally also includes the devices when closed together in use about the said elongate objects, preferably electrical wires, although the invention may also be useful with optical fibres or other elongate objects.

Specific embodiments of the present invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein :-

Figure 1 shows in perspective a device according to the invention comprising two hinged casing members containing gel sealant;

Figure 2 shows a side view in cross section taken on the lines 2-2 of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is an enlarged view of the displaceable wall region shown on the right hand side of Figure 2; and

Figures 4 to 6 show the displaceable wall region of both casing members of the device in three stages of closure around an electrical wire.

Referring to Figures 1 and 2, casing members 10 and 11 are hinged together by living hinge 12, the casing members and hinge having been formed in one piece by injection moulding of glass-fibre-filled polypropylene, the glass fibre content being 40% by weight of the whole composition. Gel 13 is shown in the receptacles formed in each of the casing members respectively by end walls 14 and 15, side walls 16 and 17, and displaceable end walls 18 and 19. The reactive liquid pre-cursor components of the gel are automatically filled into the receptacles on a continuous filling production line and allowed to remain there for a few hours while the polymerising reaction forms the gel. The polysiloxane precursor materials are well known and have a very low viscosity initially approaching that of water. After the cross-linking polymerisation reaction of the polysiloxane components, the set gel is soft and flexible, and has strong cohesion demonstrated by a high elongation to break and by the ability of the respective gel bodies, after being brought together face to face as hereinafter described, to separate cleanly at the interface between them, which is advantageous for re-entry where repair or alteration of the enclosed objects is desired. Snap-fit closure means 20 and 21 are provided on the side walls 16, 17 to secure the two casing members together on closure. Flexible fingers 22, 23 are provided to give extra protection at the open end of the device from which the enclosed objects such as wires will project after closure.

As shown in more detail in Figure 3, the displaceable end walls 18, 19 have at their ends enlarged portions 24, 25, which provide camming surfaces for the displacement of the end walls 18, 19 upon closure of the device. The end walls are moulded with a suitably weakened or hinged portion 26 to facilitate the displacement. The walls 18 and 19 are secured in the upright position as illustrated by very short frangible plastics webs (not visible in these illustrations) extending between each

camming member 24 or 25 and its adjacent side wall 16 or 17, which webs are broken by the displacement action of the camming surfaces upon closure of the device.

In Figures 4 to 6, a wire 27 is shown as representative of a substantially flat array of wires (viewed edge-on) with which the device is especially useful, for example in enclosing and protecting a flat multi-wire connector of a type known in the automotive wiring industry. As closure of the device around the wires progresses from Figure 4 through Figure 5 to Figure 6, the flexible fingers 22, 23 are progressively bent aside as they come into contact with the wires and/or with each other and the camming members 24, 25 make contact (Figure 5) and progressively displace the end walls 18, 19 from their initial upright position (Figure 5) to a flattened position (Figure 6) with consequent rupture of the aforementioned frangible webs. These webs are provided not only to retain the end walls more strongly in the initial upright position, but also to prevent leakage of low-viscosity gel forming reactants around the ends of the displaceable wall. As the position shown in Figure 6 is approached, the snap-fit securing members 20, 21 engage to lock the device in the closed position.

CLAIMS:

1. A device for enclosing portions of elongate objects and sealant material, comprising at least two (preferably only two) casing members closeable together to enclose the said portions of the objects in use, at least one of the casing members having a floor portion and upstanding walls forming a receptacle capable of receiving settable fluid sealant material and retaining it until set, wherein at least one of the said upstanding walls is arranged for displacement by contact with one or more displacing parts of the other said casing member upon closure.
2. A device according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the casing members are arranged so that when they are closed together in use to enclose the said portions of the objects, the said portions of the objects are at least partly within the said receptacle and extend therefrom through space previously occupied by the displaced wall.
3. A device according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the said receptacle has at least two upstanding walls, preferably four upstanding walls, the receptacle preferably being substantially rectangular, and the displaceable wall preferably constitutes substantially the whole of one of the upstanding walls.
4. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the said displaceable wall is substantially straight.
5. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the said displacing part(s) is(are) arranged to contact at least one (preferably both) end region(s) of the displaceable wall to bring about the said displacement in use.
6. A device according to claim 5, wherein the said end region(s) of the displaceable wall is(are) enlarged to form a cam or lever on which the said displacing part bears to effect the said displacement in use.

7. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the displaceable wall is hinged to the casing member carrying it and the arrangement is such that the said displacement in use involves hinging movement of the displaceable wall.
8. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the arrangement is such that substantially the whole length of the displaceable wall is displaced upon closure of the casing members together in use.
9. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein frangible webs connect each end of the displaceable wall to an adjacent wall, the webs being frangible by forces they encounter during the said displacement of the displaceable wall in use.
10. A device according to any preceding claim, the said receptacle having only one displaceable wall so that the said elongate objects in use extend from the device substantially in a single direction.
11. A device according to any of claims 1 to 9, the said receptacle having at least two displaceable walls so that the said elongate objects in use can extend from the device in at least two directions inclined to each other at an angle, preferably of at least 60°C, more preferably at least 90°C, especially preferably substantially 180°C.
12. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the said other casing member forms a second receptacle with at least one displaceable wall and any of the features specified for the receptacle and displaceable wall(s) according to any preceding claim apply mutatis mutandis to this second receptacle and its displaceable wall(s).
13. A device according to claim 12, wherein the displaceable wall(s) of each casing member incorporate(s) the cam or lever formations according to claim 6 and the said formations on the displaceable wall(s) of each casing member bear on the

corresponding said formations of the other casing member to effect the said displacement.

14. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the casing members are moulded as integral units of plastics material, preferably polypropylene.
15. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the casing members are hinged together ready for the said closure in use, preferably by formation of a hinge in moulding according to claim 14.
16. A device according to any preceding claim, wherein the casing members are snap-fittable together to secure the said closure.
17. A device according to any preceding claim, shaped to fit closely around portions of a substantially flat array of elongate objects, preferably electrical wires, the diameter of the largest enclosed object preferably being not more than 4 times, more preferably not more than twice, the diameter of the smallest enclosed object.
18. A device according to any preceding claim, including the said sealant material in the said receptacle(s), the sealant material preferably being a gel, more preferably a cross-linked polysiloxane gel.
19. A device according to claim 17, closed together about the said elongate objects, preferably electrical wires.

* * * * *

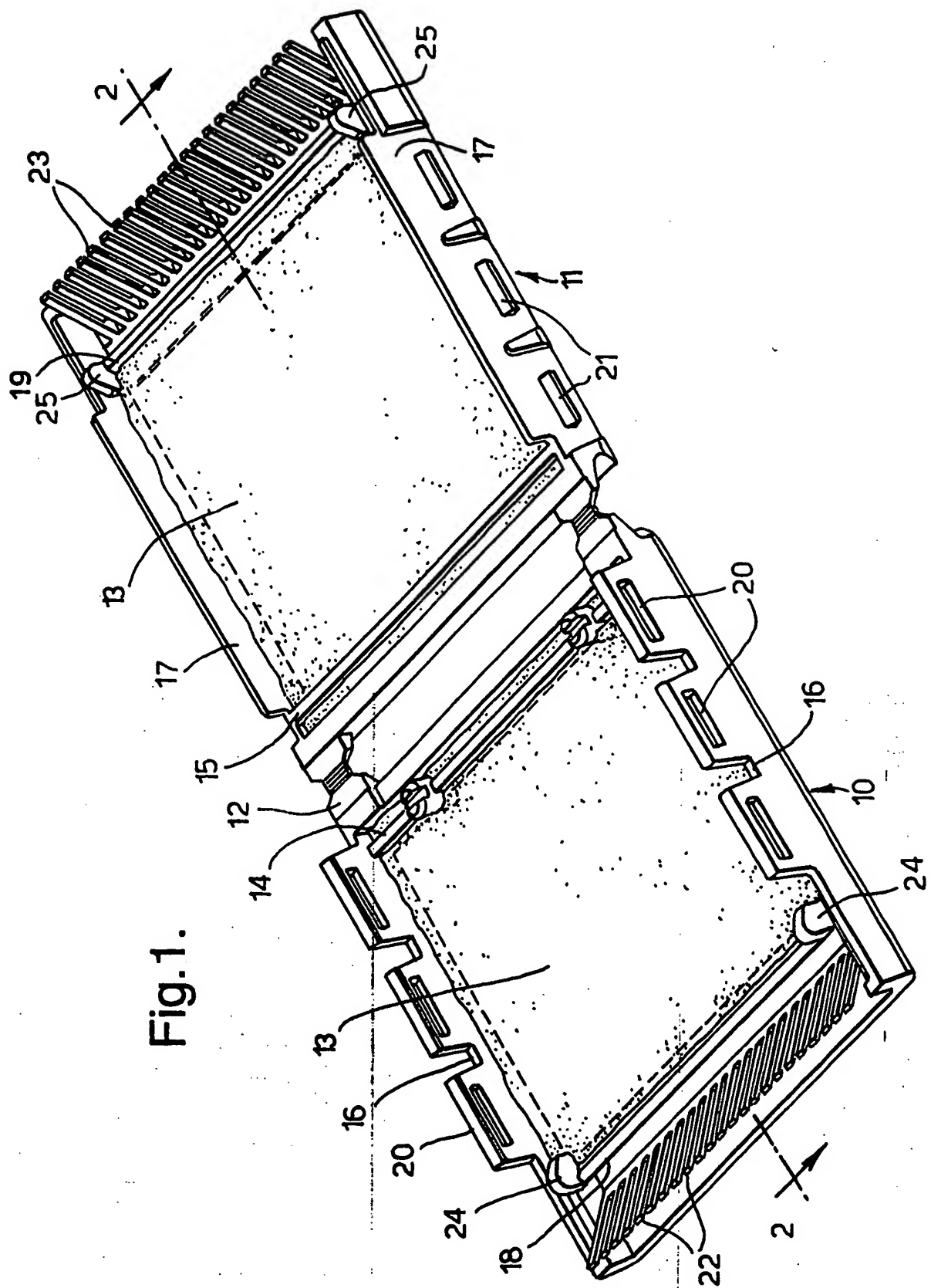


Fig. 1.

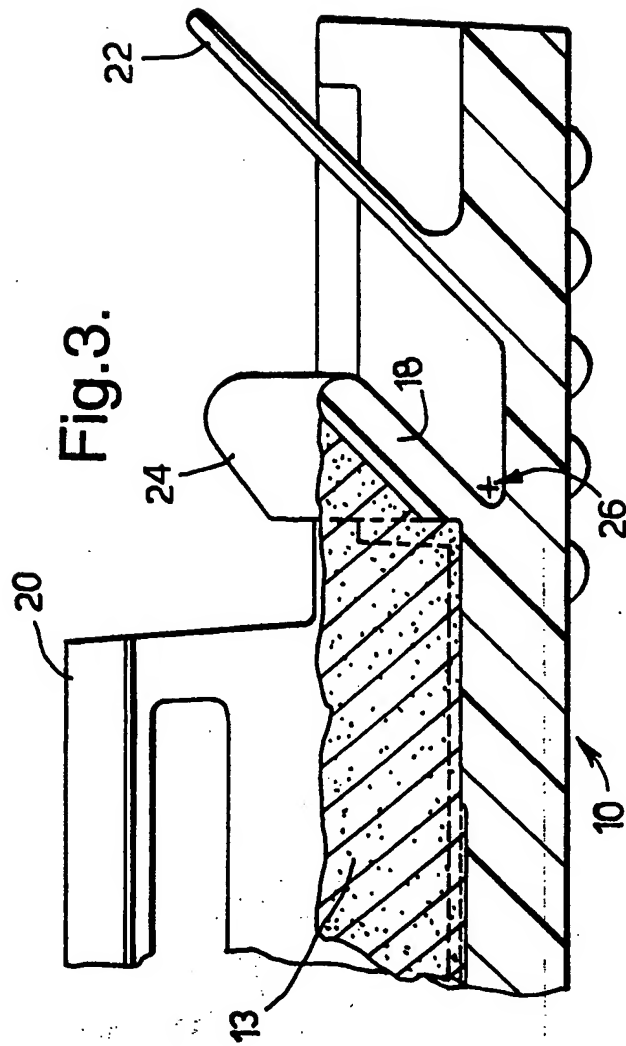


Fig.2.

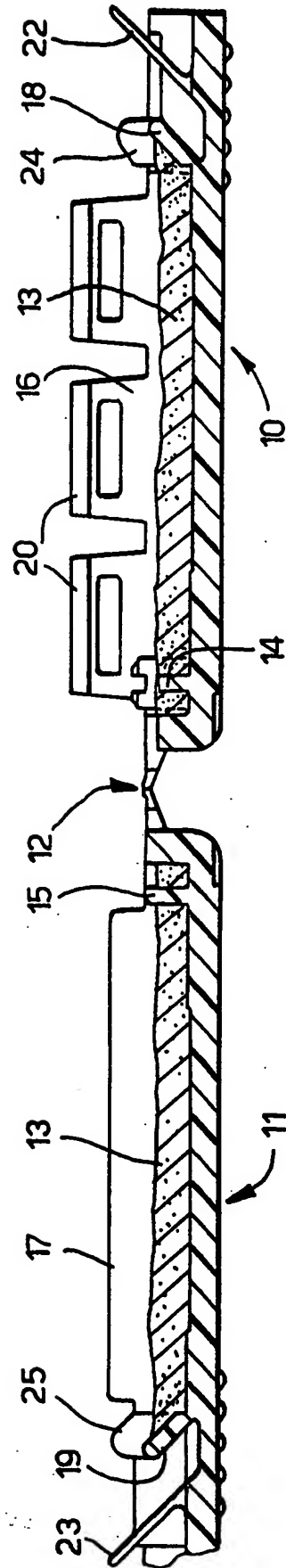


Fig.4.

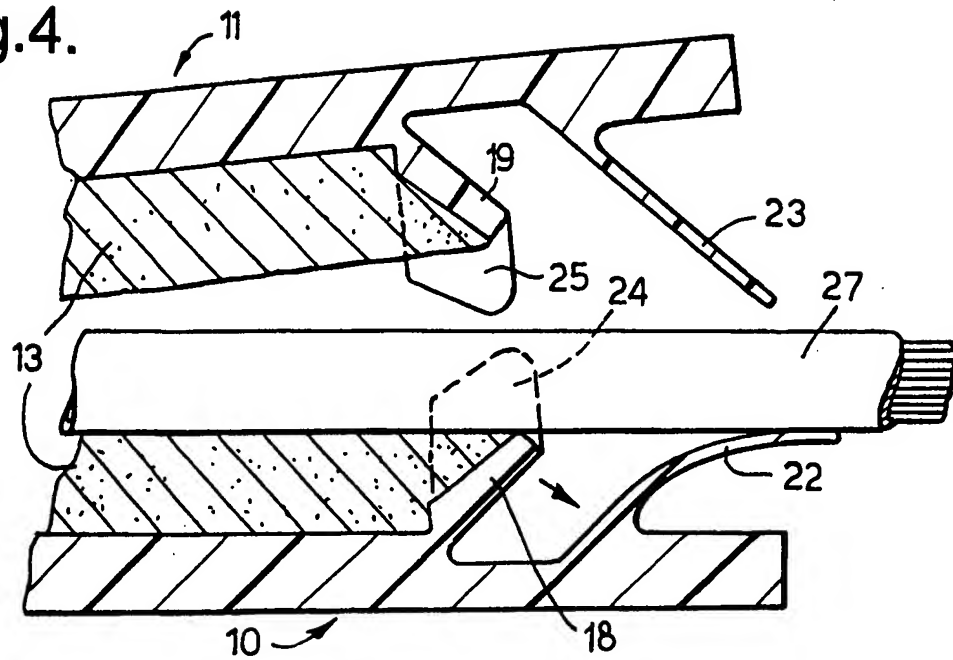


Fig.5.

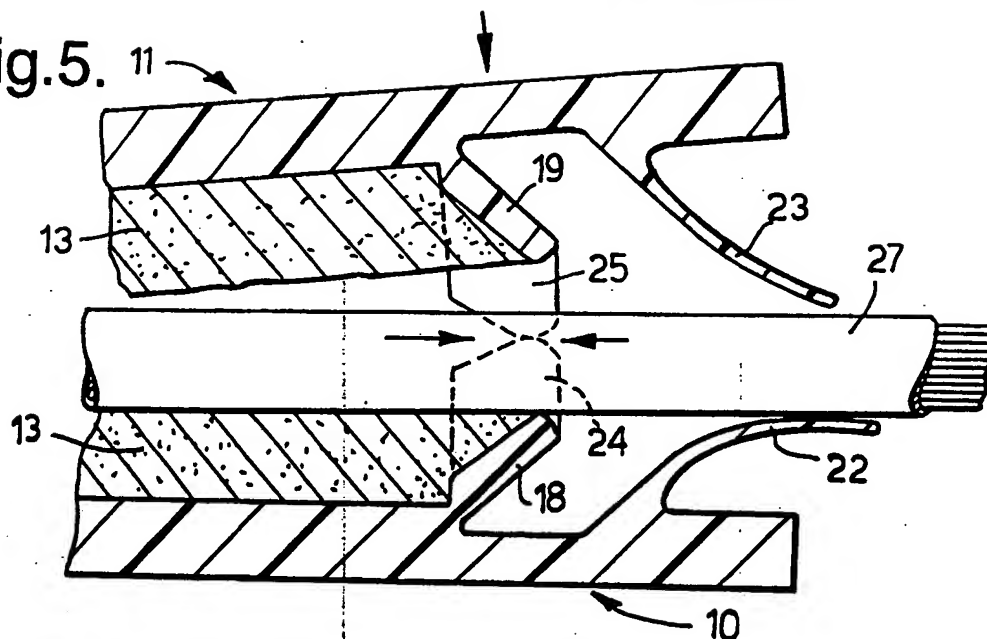
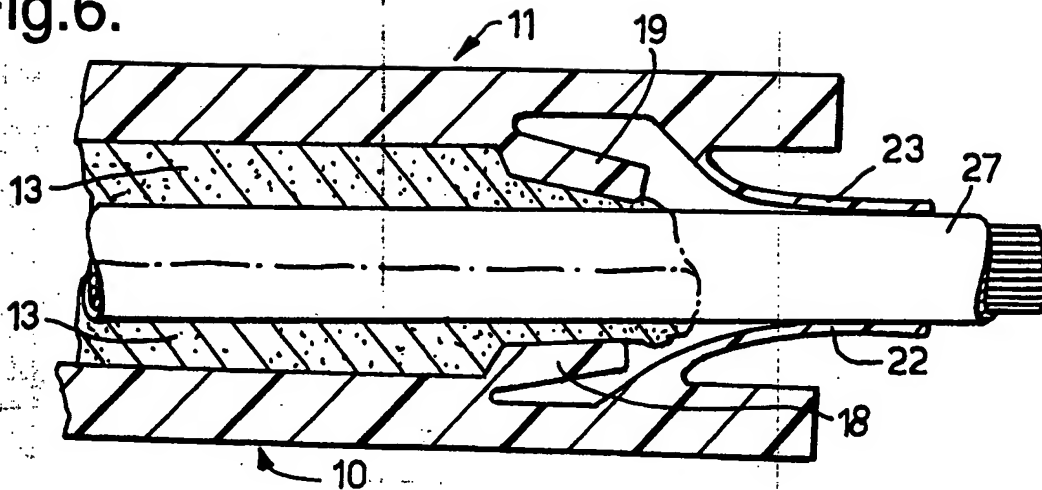


Fig.6.



A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 6 H01R4/70 H02G15/18

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 H01R H02G

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US,A,5 397 859 (ROBERTSON ET AL.) 14 March 1995 see column 6, line 7 - line 24; figure 1 ---	1-4,7-9, 11,12, 14-16, 18,19
A	US,A,5 371 323 (SCHNEIDER ET AL.) 6 December 1994 see column 4, line 27 - column 5, line 7; figures 1,4 ---	1,2,4,7, 9,10,12, 14-16, 18,19
A	DE,U,93 08 361 (KABELMETAL ELECTRO GMBH) 22 July 1993 see page 3, paragraph 3 - paragraph 4 see page 4, paragraph 6; figures 1,4 ---	1,2, 9-11,14, 17-19
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	<p>US,A,4 718 678 (VANSANT) 12 January 1988 see column 3, line 27 - line 30 -----</p>	1,18

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US-A-5371323	06-12-94	NONE	
DE-U-9308361	22-07-93	NONE	
US-A-4718678	12-01-88	FR-A- 2583314	19-12-86